‘Our greatest asset’: *Encounter* Magazine and the Congress for Cultural Freedom

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Encounter was the brightest star in the constellation of magazines that were lavishly, and secretly, funded by the CIA during the Cold War. In 1964, Michael Josselson told Edward Shils that *Encounter* was ‘our greatest asset’.[1] This was a striking assertion from the executive director of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the man who was responsible for orchestrating over twenty magazines, some high-profile publications. Measured assessment of the achievement of *Encounter* as a cultural-intellectual monthly magazine, even as a weapon in the Cold War, demands close attention to a knot of intertwined issues. The role of the CCF in the financing and on the editorial direction of *Encounter* during its highly controversial lifespan are, of course, crucial to any scrupulous and discriminating interpretation of the contents and the reception of the magazine. Comparative analysis of *Encounter*, viewed within the global stable of CCF magazines, is extremely useful in seeking to calibrate the impact of *Encounter* on the cultural Cold War. The comparative perspective afforded by case studies of magazines complicates and enriches our understanding of the CCF, since it reveals the extent to which editors, contributors, readers and antagonists of these magazines were inescapably affected by thickly textured local political and cultural conditions, as well as by the tensions arising from competing national and transnational agendas.

Established in response to the escalation of the Cold War, the Congress for Cultural Freedom was designed to strengthen what Daniel Bell characterised (in a testimonial for Josselson) as ‘a large international body of intellectuals devoted to the defense of the democratic idea’.[2] As a branch of ‘psychological warfare’, the CIA must have hoped that the CCF could counteract the success of Communism in the cultural and intellectual spheres – the prestige of Russian classical music and ballet; the coup of Picasso’s Peace Dove[3] – and expose totalitarian oppression behind the Iron Curtain. According to Michael Hochgeschwender, the establishment of the CCF in 1950 came at a time when ‘well-written magazines and highbrow liberal propaganda were as important as battle-cruisers, missiles, or marines’.[4] Giles Scott-Smith suggests that the CCF was ‘the cultural counterpart to NATO, such that each national intelligentsia must recognise their membership of a wider group of Western intellectuals who had the same interests and values to defend’.[5] Both

Hochgeschwender and Scott-Smith emphasise the Atlanticist cultural consensus promoted by the Congress and pursued by means of explicit anti-communist propaganda rather than covert actions, including large-scale international conferences which championed the values of Western liberal democracies or, more narrowly, the American ideal of a liberal-capitalist democracy. In Hochgeschwender's words: 'The major components were liberal individualism, the common heritage of the European Enlightenment, the rule of law, Wilsonian internationalism, pragmatism, and urban cosmopolitanism. . . . The transnational, universal elements of the CCF's intellectual and political commitment by far outweighed national specifics.'[6]

Having said that, national specifics colour the dissemination and contestation of the CCF's efforts to promote the values of hegemonic American power (under the cloak of liberal universalism) to variegated intellectual elites. European nations, after all, faced quite distinct political and cultural situations in the aftermath of the Second World War. Melvin Lasky's foundational conception of an international network of intellectuals was inspired by the cosmopolitanism of T.S. Eliot's London interwar review, *The Criterion*. Eliot recalled this international mission during a 1946 BBC radio broadcast to occupied Germany: 'It was the assumption that there existed an international fraternity of men of letters, within Europe: a bond which did not replace, but was perfectly compatible with, national loyalties, and differences of political philosophy.'[7] Eliot claimed that 'the existence of such a network of independent reviews, at least one in every capital of Europe, is necessary for the transmission of ideas . . . their co-operation should continually stimulate that circulation of influence of thought and sensibility, between nation and nation in Europe, which fertilises and renovates from abroad the literature of each one of them.'[8] Eliot offered his remarks in the service of a European Latin-Christian tradition, a 'conservative revolution', but Lasky and the CCF would repurpose them as Cold War anti-communist rhetoric.[9]

In 1951, the CCF established *Preuves* with the aim of combating an entrenched anti-Americanism in Paris, exhibited by *Les Temps Modernes* and prominent Left Bank fellow-travellers. It was entirely natural that the CCF should seek to draw Britain into the Atlanticist intellectual alliance that it attempted to build between the United States and Western Europe, although the existence of an anti-communist CCF journal issued in London was very likely to be inflected by British distaste for strident propaganda as well as social snobbery toward American-led ventures, typified by the irritable reports of Hugh Trevor-Roper and A.J. Ayer on the

inaugural 1950 Berlin CCF conference.[10] After February 1953, when Josselson invited Stephen Spender to Paris to discuss 'an English edition of *Preuves*', the cultural politics at work in London made Josselson's transnational directives – reflecting the view from the Paris headquarters of the CCF – difficult to efficiently stage-manage.[11]

These complications were evident right from the outset when, in October 1953, T.S. Eliot declined Spender's invitation to contribute to *Encounter* on the grounds that the magazine is 'obviously published under American auspices'.[12] (By contrast, Eliot published a goodwill 'Message' to launch John Lehmann's rival *London Magazine* in February 1954).[13] Spender informed Josselson that Eliot's opinion revealed 'the kind of reputation we have to try and live down of being a magazine disguising American propaganda under a veneer of British culture'.[14] Spender's London coterie was often contemptuous of the putative philistinism of his fellow American editors. A 1955 memorandum, 'Reflections on *Encounter*', jointly composed by the British editor, Spender, and the American editor, Irving Kristol, explained to a sceptical Josselson:

> [*Encounter*] has its responsibilities, too, as well as its advantages. For one thing, it means paying special attention to British writers, painters, musicians, etc. – even if our American and French friends don't think they are worth it. For another, being British imposes a certain tone on the magazine – one rather more muted than, say, that of most American political periodicals.

The editors went on to declare that 'being British' meant:

> that we have to try extra hard to get British political writers as well as British short-story writers. It would be intolerable – and would not be tolerated by our readers – were the political features in *Encounter* written by Americans or Germans, while the British contributed the poetry. This means we must publish British political writers, with all their particular accents and emphases and prejudices. Some of these accents and emphases, even among writers friendly to the Congress, are not to everyone's taste. But they must, in the nature of things be to *Encounter*'s taste.[15]

Nevertheless, straight-talking Kristol had earlier boasted to Josselson that 'in *Encounter*, the Congress has hold of something far more important than even you realize. . . . Potentially, we have it in us to become, in a few months, *the* English-language cultural periodical, and not only in England but for Asia too.'[16]

The clandestine funding of *Encounter* by the CIA has led to assumptions that access to classified documents is required to decode the real character of the

magazine. Frances Stonor Saunders's *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (1999) claimed to provide an account of the 'hidden history' of *Encounter* grounded on her investigative journalism, and yet its conclusions have a tendency to indulge in hyperbole about 'spies who knew the price of culture' at the expense of a painstaking or informed analysis of the contents of the magazine.[17] Her requests to the CIA under the Freedom of Information Act were stonewalled, but beyond the framing of a rather restrictive research question of 'who paid the piper?' it is not clear what Saunders was hoping to discover from these requests. If it was how the CIA diverted money through a front organisation, the Farfield Foundation, in order to subsidise *Encounter*, then *The New York Times* and *Ramparts* had uncovered and published this information in 1966-67. At the height of the public debacle, Thomas Braden, who had run the CIA's International Organisations Division, published an article in the wide-circulation *Saturday Evening Post* unapologetically acknowledging the CIA's secret cultural interventions and making the claim that an 'agent became an editor of *Encounter*'.[18]

In the late 1990s, Frank Kermode visited the *Encounter* archives held in the Howard Gotlieb Archive Center, Boston University. In 2003, Kermode complained to me that although these papers remain uncatalogued they were 'probably carefully selected by Lasky'.[19] In fact, the *Encounter* archives in Boston comprise some 104 boxes of manuscripts, proofs, correspondence, as well as the personal files of Melvin Lasky. Lasky's biographer, Maren Roth, thinks it is doubtful that the hard-pressed editor carefully inspected these papers before they were posted from London to Boston; they are unsorted and it is only if we subscribe to Saunders's tales of 'spies who knew the price of culture' that we will assume widespread shredding of incriminating material. Since Lasky reported directly to Josselson, why should his papers contain CIA links?

The papers of Michael Josselson kept at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin, are testimony to the Cold Warrior's pride in the work of the CCF. Josselson's papers state that the Congress was not to be used for covert espionage and they demonstrate his clear reluctance to censor the contributions to *Encounter*. It is arguable that Josselson's refusal to tell Kristol or Spender about the CIA subsidy was not an unscrupulous ploy corrupting the integrity of free-thinking intellectuals, but rather a position intended to preserve

their editorial autonomy in a manner that would be inconceivable under the state-controlled cultural production of the Soviet Union.

The archival record is remarkably rich in information bearing on the critical question of the magazine's editorial independence from the CCF (or CIA). John Sutherland drew upon Spender's private archives for his authorised biography in order to contend that 'Spender knew nothing of the CCF's covert political connections with the CIA'.[20] Sutherland mentions letters from 1963 and 1964 where Spender demanded answers to rumours of secret donors, as well as the assurances that Spender and Frank Kermode received in 1966 after the *New York Times* published the CIA links. Most convincing of all is the evidence of Spender's letter to Malcolm Muggeridge dated 24 April 1967, after *Ramparts* had exposed the CIA front organisation subsidising *Encounte*r, in which Spender responds in pained and angry tones to the suggestion that he ought to have known the true source of funding. The wealth of archives reveal only two cases where Josselson spiked a contribution to *Encounter* and one of these – written by an erstwhile editor, Dwight MacDonald – subsequently appeared in a sister CCF journal *Tempo Presente*. Josselson directed stinging criticism at maverick Kristol by declaring, 'As far as Congress publications go, *Encounter* is the weakest link in the chain', thereby asserting his impatience at the magazine's resistance to pressure from the CCF.[21] It should be pointed out that the extensive unpublished minutes of the CCF Executive Committee, deposited in the Joseph Regenstein Library, Chicago, do not indicate any systematic manipulation of the contents of *Encounter*, supporting Peter Coleman's conclusion: 'The Executive Committee only occasionally debated over *Encounter* and in general supported it enthusiastically.'[22]

Each of the major archival collections presents challenges for the independent-minded researcher who must question implicit assumptions built into cataloguing systems and construct convincing narratives that bridge gaps, preconceived bias or contradictions. The historian is always dubious about the extant archival record and critically weighs the testimony of advocates against detractors. Not only must any public contribution to this contentious subject tread warily given the anxieties of the protagonist's estates who naturally want to see historical justice done to their man, but the magazine that trumpeted the 'end of ideology' inevitably gets swept up in fierce ideological winds.[23] Since archives cannot speak for themselves, they require scholars to patiently and carefully draw out their significance. Hugh Wilford's research on the

CIA has made exemplary use of archival material in tracing complex webs of state-private networks; notably, he assigns an active role to the editors of *Encounter* and their collaborators.[24] Archives should be employed to illuminate the contours of public confrontations and controversies, but they cannot be used to simply contradict the published record when the contents of *Encounter* tell a far more intricate, tangled and interesting story than straightforward corruption by power. After twenty years researching in the archives of cultural-intellectual magazines, it is my belief that archive material is supplementary rather than revelatory when interpreting the positions articulated by authors in public.

In her chapter on the founding of *Encounter,* Saunders asserts: 'In all cases, it was resolutely ideological, an integer of anti-Communist Cold War thinking.'[25] But this resolutely ideological approach to *Encounter* does not give a satisfactory account of the diversity of the contents of the magazine. Was Nancy Mitford's popular article on 'U and non-U' English idiolects really 'an integer of anti-Communist Cold-War thinking'? Were Philip Larkin's 'Whitsun Weddings' or Ted Hughes's 'Thrushes' accepted by *Encounter* as calculated moves in the pass and fell of mighty Cold War superpowers? C.P. Snow's 1959 'Two Cultures' Rede lecture and Iris Murdoch's 1961 essay 'Against Dryness' require subtle and nuanced exegesis to unfold the Cold War contexts in which they are steeped, but which they address only obliquely in the pages of *Encounter*.[26] From its beginning in 1953 until the exposure of CIA funding, *Encounter* was never the crude programmatic mouthpiece that it is sometimes taken to be. Comparative analysis shows that the zealous anti-Communism that came easily to some other CCF journals was lightly sprinkled over *Encounter* – otherwise, it would not have been so eagerly anticipated by a sophisticated sizeable readership in London.

Through his extensive contacts in literary London, including networks of contributors to *Horizon* magazine (which had folded in 1950), Spender quickly built up *Encounter* as a leading venue in London for literature and the arts. *Encounter* was respectful to the legacy of European modernism, in spite of the hostility to liberal democracy that was displayed in many of these works. This point of view could lead to generational friction with the 'Angry Young Men' and Movement Poets – whom Spender accused of not appreciating the bold experimentalism of their modernist predecessors. Greg Barnhisel's *Cold War Modernists* (2015) asserts that *Encounter* stands witness to the death of modernism: 'In staking its claim that modernism is the dominant tradition of the century and that Western freedom and individualism

allowed it to become so, *Encounter* also eulogized modernism as a vital literary and artistic movement.'[27] In spite of the destructive energies represented by modernist dislocation, it could be seen as liberating and creative from the perspective of a Cold War liberal individualist. According to Barnhisel's analysis: 'In *Encounter*, modernism represents vitality and individualism and freedom and thus the superiority of the West'.[28]

Frank Kermode's discrimination among modernisms appeared in the two-part article he published in March and April 1966 when he was an editor of *Encounter*. Kermode differentiated between 'two phases of modernism' that 'are equally devoted to the theme of crisis, equally apocalyptic' adding that each 'reacts to a painful transitional situation' but one in terms of continuity and the other in terms of schism.[29] Kermode made it clear that he valued the 'formal desperation' displayed by great experimental modernists – Kafka, Proust, Joyce, Musil, Lawrence, Eliot – over the 'decreation' of Dada and John Cage.[30] A Cold War imperative hangs over Kermode's discriminations which gesture towards his study of imaginative fictions – above all, modernist fictions of apocalypse – in *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), a subject that he had first broached in 1965 at a CCF symposium at Rutgers on 'The Idea of the Future'. Kermode's meditations on beginnings, middles and ends, on those necessary fictions that require acts of faith in times of great uncertainty, is a reaction not only to the revolutionary violence of Communism but the 'age of anxiety' ushered in by the threat of nuclear extinction. If, as Kermode proposes, only a projected 'end' can give intelligible shape to our conceptions of meaning and purpose, his own faith in this period of ideological conflict rests implicitly on liberal continuities and not revolutionary schism. In this sense, Kermode's writings on modernism reveal him to be an 'unwitting agent' of the CIA/CCF defence of an Atlanticist liberal consensus.

Encounter's meditation on the legacies of modernism are germane to Hugh Wilford's remark that 'the very category of "Modernism" promulgated in British academe was, arguably, in large part an invention of American literary critics writing in the early Cold War period.'[31] It is equally true to say that the discipline of American literary studies promulgated in British academe was in large part an invention of British and American critics writing in *Encounter*. Here, Wilford's caveat that the promotion of American cultural values operated 'in a far more complex and *mediated* process than notions of "Americanization" or US "cultural imperialism" would lead one to suppose' is reflected by the contents of *Encounter*.[32]

A good example is the writings of Marcus Cunliffe (the first lecturer of American Studies in Britain and in 1955 a founder of the British Association of American Studies), who could subsume US political, economic and military supremacy under a patronising colonialist attitude, downplaying claims for American exceptionalism and highlighting the influence of Europe on American culture.

In a 1961 *Encounter* essay 'Europe and America', Cunliffe tackled signs of anti-Americanism, observing pointedly: 'Why must America serve as a scapegoat for Europe's own weaknesses? Why must Europeans blame America for imposing upon them a mass culture which they in fact eagerly accept?' Reviewing C. Wright Mills's indictment of *The Power Elite* (1956) with scorn, Cunliffe declared that 'America is maturing as a nation, instead of going rotten'.[33] His commitment to American liberal democracy was tested by the radicalism of the New Left in the 1960s. The protests of the civil rights movement shook Cunliffe's optimism for American race relations, a subject that he addressed on several occasions in his contributions to *Encounter*: he acknowledged that faced with the militancy and menace of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers 'moderates are made to appear foolish and even treacherous'.[34] In his 1955 *Encounter* article examining American intellectuals, Cunliffe sorted the 'alienated' (such as Norman Mailer) from the 'non-alienated' (for example, Lionel Trilling).[35]

A collection of *Encounter*'s best articles on American literature would be densely populated by the self-assertive brio of New York and Chicago intellectuals – Dwight MacDonald on Ernest Hemingway, Leslie Fiedler on Walt Whitman, Mary McCarthy on Arthur Miller, Diana Trilling on Norman Mailer, Irving Howe on Edith Wharton, Lionel Trilling on Vladimir Nabokov – but also penetrating younger British critics – David Daiches on Mark Twain, Tony Tanner on Henry James, Frank Kermode on Wallace Stevens. The magazine's wholehearted engagement with American literature is immeasurably superior to the tentative forays of *Scrutiny* before its demise in 1953, or that of Lehmann's *London Magazine*, outstanding on British fiction and poetry, but which in 1954 offered one short story by Tennessee Williams and a poem by Richard Eberhart as its American fare. Set alongside the original work published in *Encounter* by Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke, Marianne Moore, James Agee, Jack Kerouac, William Faulkner, e. e. Cummings, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Randall Jarrell, Vladimir Nabokov, Sylvia Plath, Saul Bellow and Gore Vidal, *The London Magazine* must have struck American readers as symptomatic of a post-war British austerity, rationing foreign imports. The vital role

that *Encounter* played in shaping a canon of American literature for British consumption, discredited by the disclosure of indirect CIA money, has disappeared almost without trace.

Literature was central to *Encounter*'s celebration of what Lionel Trilling called the 'liberal imagination'. Writing in the shadow of the Holocaust and of McCarthyism, Trilling was vigilant about the tendency of American liberal pieties to deform into a repressive dogma; he warns of the dangers that institutions and agencies and bureaus can present to the liberal pluralist values of 'variousness and possibility, complexity and difficulty'.[36] In a 1958 *Encounter* essay 'Reflections on a Lost Cause', Trilling records his unease at contemporary 'political influences on our literary education', such as UNESCO's role in cultural affairs or the clamour of students in the US to study contemporary literature.[37] Trilling believed that the study of literature should nourish the 'moral passions', praising its 'unique effectiveness in opening the mind and illuminating it, in purging the mind of prejudices and received ideas, in making the mind free and active'. His 1965 *Encounter* essay, 'The Two Environments: Reflections on the Study of English', signalled a rejection of the cant of authenticity voiced by an American middle-class counter culture which celebrated R.D. Laing in favour of the rational humanism of Freud. 'What makes the troubled heart of the matter', he observed, 'is the belief that the new undergraduates are characteristically drawn to modern literature . . . the students, we hear, press towards the contemporary and increasingly demand its inclusion in the curriculum'.[38] But Trilling endorsed Saul Bellow's impatience in a 1963 *Encounter* article on recent American fiction, directed against those contemporary US novelists (including Philip Roth) who view 'modern life with a bitterness to which they themselves have not established clear title'.[39] By contrast, Trilling's 1958 *Encounter* essay on *Lolita* offers a remarkable defence of the novel as a mature and courageous exploration of the ideals and the illusions of love.[40]

The forms of attention that *Encounter* devoted to the liberal imagination differentiated it from other outlets for the New York intellectuals – *Partisan Review*, *The New Leader* and *Commentary* – where by comparison the radical political outlook voiced by a Trotskyite anti-Stalinist left could appear heavy-handed. For instance, Mary McCarthy, in common with many anti-communist liberals, had been critical of the social realism of Arthur Miller's plays. However, in a 1957 article 'The Arthur Miller Case', she offered readers of *Encounter* an empathetic portrait of the

beleaguered dramatist's appearances before the House UnAmerican Actvities Committee (HUAC). McCarthy respected Miller's refusal to 'name names' and concluded that 'the whole purport of such hearings is to reduce the private conscience to a niggling absurdity'.[41] Indeed, as a reflection of the founding principles of the CCF – 'We hold it to be self-evident that intellectual freedom is one of the inalienable rights of man' – *Encounter* was notably stronger in defending Miller's civil liberties than *Partisan Review* or *Commentary*, where he had been abused as a communist fellow-traveller, and even labelled a Stalinist.[42]

This is not to say that contemporaries could not find good reasons to dislike the high moral tone of *Encounter*. In his trenchant 1963 review of an *Encounter* anthology for *The New Statesman*, Conor Cruise O'Brien accused the magazine of selective bias in its articles on Cuba, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Vietnam, Korea, South Africa, and the struggle for civil rights by black Americans, that was a tantamount to an ideological blindspot.[43] O'Brien was rehearsing long-standing grievances rather than paying close attention to the volume under review, which was overwhelmingly cultural in content and liberal-pluralist in character. The subsequent unfolding of this spat was intensified by *Encounter*'s clashes with *The New Statesman*, Britain's pre-eminent intellectual monthly, a staunch supporter of the Bevanite left-wing of the Labour Party rather than the Atlanticist Gaitskellites (including Tony Crosland, Denis Healey and Roy Jenkins, who wrote for *Encounter*), and considered to be too soft on the Soviet Union.[44] In 1964, William Empson, who attacked *Encounter*'s treatment of Communist China, recommended O'Brien (unsuccessfully) as editor of the *New Statesman*, explaining to Christopher Ricks: 'He is a man of firm principles but much good humour and good sense, and a really impressive power of not getting rattled.'[45] 'The Cruiser' (as this former UN diplomat was known) could be a formidable polemicist when it came to reading literature in its broader political contexts: he consciously strove to live up to an Orwellian ideal of 'intellectual courage in the pursuit of truth; moral courage in the telling of truth'.[46]

What infuriated O'Brien about the *Encounter* anthology was less this sampling of its contents drawn from the first decade, but the self-congratulatory introduction by the Cambridge historian Sir Denis Brogan. Brogan praised *Encounter* as nonconformist in the best traditions of the great nineteenth-century intellectual reviews – the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Revue de Deux Mondes*. According to Brogan, *Encounter* was a robust '*journal de combat*' unafraid to stand proud in 'the

promulgation of uncomfortable truths' – 'reminding us of the realities beyond the Iron Curtain' and protesting that the 'chief Communist crime in the world of the mind has been the abolition of the idea of truth'.[47] On the contrary, O'Brien saw a hypocritical treason of the intellectuals in the pursuit of binary Cold War polemics: 'Reading through the files of *Encounter*, I found little evidence of vigilance against non-Soviet intellectual dishonesty. . . . Where the truth in question is uncomfortable for the Soviet Union it is promulgated; where it is uncomfortable for the United States it is mitigated.' He concluded: 'what *Encounter* means when it says that it loves liberty is merely that it hates communism'.[48]

O'Brien harboured a dislike of *Encounter* that developed into an obsession. He refused an invitation to review for the journal as a point of principle. After moving to New York University in 1965 as the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities, he heard rumours among the gossipy Upper West Side intellectuals that *Encounter* was in receipt of secret State Department funds and redoubled his attacks on the magazine. In May 1966, O'Brien used his Homer Watt lecture at New York University to decry *Encounter* as partial and prejudiced (distributing copies of his lecture at a New York gathering of the International PEN society):

> Over the years the magazine, shrewdly edited, adequately financed and efficiently distributed, attracted many writers who hardly noticed, or did not think it important, that this forum was not quite an open forum, that its political acoustics were a little odd, that the sonorities at the Eastern end were of a quite different character from the western ones. Thus writers of high achievement and complete integrity were led unconsciously to validate, through their collaboration, the more purposeful activities of lesser writers who in turn were engaged in a sustained and consistent political activity in the interests – and as it now appears at the expense – of the power structure in Washington.[49]

In point of fact, by this time the CCF was no longer underwritten by the CIA, after Josselson secured a huge grant from the Ford Foundation in 1964. It was the Cruiser's appetite for a fight that led to the chain of events which culminated in his successful libel suit against the editors of *Encounter* and their all-too-public disgrace.[50]

The relation of *Encounter* to the CIA does raise troubling questions about intellectual autonomy and editorial oversight. Isn't the freedom of the press a central pillar in safeguarding freedom in a liberal democracy? In the climate of the late 1960s, tensions exacerbated by the CIA's role in US foreign policy led to harsh condemnation from the New Left. In 1967, Christopher Lasch was scathing about the

CCF, complaining that 'the whole wretched business seemed inescapably to point to the conclusion that cultural freedom had been consistently confused with American propaganda, and that "cultural freedom," as defined by its leading defenders, was – to put it bluntly – a hoax'.[51] *Encounter*'s CIA paymasters offend Edward Said's image of intellectuals as 'oppositional' truth-tellers or Julien Benda's vision of independent *clercs*. Said was excited by Saunders's lacerating portrait of 'insidious intellectual abuses of American power' which he understood as 'important signs of stirring intellectual restlessness and even of a kind of incitement, which is what is needed most of all'.[52] And yet, *Who Paid the Piper?* overestimates the CIA's control over the contents of *Encounter* when it characterises the actions of the CCF as 'positioning intellectuals and their work like chess pieces to be played in the Great Game'.[53] Hugh Wilford's emphasis on the complex and mediated process by which individual authors stubbornly pursued their interests alongside those of US state-sponsors is an important corrective.

It is too often forgotten that many liberal contributors to *Encounter* were undisturbed by the revelations of CIA funding. Isaiah Berlin was forthright in stating at the time that: 'I did not in the slightest object to American sources supplying the money. I was (and am) pro-American and anti-Soviet, and if the source had been declared I would not have minded in the least'.[54] Melvin Lasky, whose dynamic editing of *Encounter* from 1958 had raised circulation of the journal to over 30,000, retained a loyal core readership of 20,000 after the CIA scandal. In a 1968 interview, he unrepentantly and robustly defended his record as editor of *Encounter*: '[We had] an important task to say what was the meaning of the Soviet Union, what was the meaning of socialism today, what was the meaning of capitalism', adding defiantly, 'anyone who has looked through any one single issue [of *Encounter*] and thinks anybody pulled any strings and that anyone could tell the writers that we were publishing what to say and how to say it and when to say it has three more guesses coming. We pulled no punches and that's why we had readers. We tried to take every issue, walk around it and face it critically.'[55] Even Kermode, who lobbied *Encounter*'s Trustees in 1967 to remove Lasky from the editorial board, conceded that: '[Lasky] was never anybody's simple mouthpiece, and if his politics closely resembled the politics of the State Department, that was because he believed the State Department had on the whole, and conveniently, got things right.'[56]

Matthew Spender's memoir recalls that the CCF 'elevated and then nearly destroyed my father'. The outcome was so devastating, he argues, since the history of *Encounter* represents 'the contamination of art by power'.[57] While recognising that under his editorship *Encounter* 'thrived as one of the most successful periodicals in Britain', the Spender family has frequently lamented the reputational damage caused by the magazine that did so much to put him on the pinnacle of London literary life during the 1950s and 1960s (at a time when his reputation as a poet was in decline).[58] Even so, the consequences of being satirized as 'Stephen Spent' in *Private Eye* are less crushing than the arrest and imprisonment of Rajat Neogy, editor of the Ugandan CCF journal, *Transition*, at the behest of Milton Obote's ruling dictatorship (nor did the fall-out from *Encounter* prevent anti-communist Spender receiving a knighthood from Margaret Thatcher's government). Nevertheless, whenever Spender reflected on *Encounter* – which he refused to read after his resignation was announced on the front pages of *The Sunday Times* and *The New York Times* – his comments were marked by bitterness. In *Love-Hate Relations: A Study of Anglo-American Sensibilities* (1974), Spender waxes cynical on the nexus of American money and power: 'even though American aid may be an exercise of American power politics, it is not so in the eyes of many Americans who, indeed, would not support the aid unless they thought of it as a pure gift; and who, when they are told that there are "strings attached", feel really distressed, and can hardly believe it to be so.'[59] *Love-Hate Relations* devotes a section to 'The Spectre of Americanization', proving his own immunity to the CCF's cultural propaganda.

Perhaps the most interesting verdict on *Encounter* issues from its chief antagonist. O'Brien had once dismissed Lasky as a 'Cold War cultural conman' but in the 1970s he wrote essays on the anti-revolutionary Edmund Burke for *Encounter*.[60] O'Brien's coded retrospective opinion of the CIA imbroglio appeared in a lecture entitled *The Press and the World* (1980):

> There have also been cases in which agencies of democratic governments, and other governments, have covertly sought to influence the media in democratic countries and have even succeeded in controlling some parts of them. The extent of that covert influence – which I spent some part of my career in combating – has often been under-estimated in the West . . . but the degree to which it is under-estimated in the West is considerably less in my view than the degree to which it is over-estimated in non-Western countries. It is worth noting that such efforts, even at their maximum, never succeeded in

> controlling more than a quite small section of the press and that their wider influence, though not quite negligible, was always small in relation to the great size and variety of the Western press. On the other hand, in the countries which do not have Western-type, democratic or free-enterprise systems, political power dominates the totality of all that is published.[61]

These are wise and worldly words: a successful intellectual magazine like *Encounter* could have had only a marginal impact on the corridors of power in Westminster and Whitehall given the complex contested arena of public political debate in the pluralist liberal democracies they sought to defend. Michael Hochgeschwender concludes that it is almost impossible to quantify the role that the CCF played in Britain: 'Perhaps it was most important in organizing personal networks and stimulating debates between British and American intellectuals and politicians', adding that its 'role should not be overestimated'.[62]

It is difficult to dispute Giles Scott-Smith's contention that: 'Despite the continuation of the Congress under an altered name and new personnel, the legitimacy of this organisation and the credibility of what it stood for was irreparably damaged'.[63] The International Association for Cultural Freedom, under the direction of Shepard Stone, continued to back *Encounter*, even if many now dismissed the contents of the magazine as indelibly tainted by complicity with the US government. Former left-wing and liberal UK contributors and readers were doubtless suspicious of this American intervention in the cultural ecology of London, especially at a time of prohibitive overheads for new publishing ventures, but those who continued to subscribe were presumably thankful for the brilliance of *Encounter* at its best, for the quality of its literary and intellectual writing, a platform for established Western writers and dissident voices from the East. Lurid narratives of US state power are accorded too much prominence in studies of the history of *Encounter*. 'There can in a sense be no such thing as a secret magazine' observed Karl Miller, the literary editor at the *New Statesman* who had commissioned O'Brien's devastating review of the *Encounter* anthology: '*Encounter* said what it had to say, and you could find out what that was by reading it'.[64] The work of patiently assessing the reach and significance of the contents of *Encounter* throughout its entire lifespan (1953-1990) is just beginning.

[1] Michael Josselson to Edward Shils, 17 February 1964, quoted in Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (London: The Free Press, 1989), p. 59.
[2] Daniel Bell, Confidential Report on Michael Josselson for Guggenheim Fellowship, 21 December 1972. Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
[3] For an account of Picasso's Communist art, see David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), pp. 568-88.
[4] Michael Hochgeschwender, 'A Battle of Ideas: The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) in Britain, Italy, France, and West Germany', in Dominik Geppert (ed.), *The Postwar Challenge: Cultural, Social, and Political Change in Western Europe, 1945-1958* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 322.
[5] Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Political Economy of American Hegemony 1945-1955* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 102.
[6] Hochgeschwender, 'A Battle of Ideas', pp. 326, 328.
[7] T.S. Eliot, 'The Unity of European Culture', *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), p. 118.
[8] Ibid., p. 116.
[9] For details, see Jason Harding, 'Defence of the West', *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 216-17.
[10] See the reports of the 1950 Berlin CCF conference by Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Manchester Guardian* (10 July 1950) and A. J. Ayer, *New Statesman and Nation* (22 Aug 1950).
[11] Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, February 1953, quoted in Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999), p. 173.
[12] T. S. Eliot to Stephen Spender, 20 October 1953, Faber & Faber Archive, London.
[13] T. S. Eliot, 'A Message', *The London Magazine* (February 1954), pp. 15-16.
[14] Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, 22 October 1953, quoted in Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, p. 67.
[15] Irving Kristol and Stephen Spender, 'Reflections on *Encounter*', January 1955, quoted in Coleman, pp. 69-70.
[16] Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, 16 September 1953, quoted in Coleman, p. 66.
[17] The blurb to *Who Paid the Piper?* reads: 'Here is one of the great stories of intellectual and artistic corruption by power, in a driving narrative full of brilliant personalities and swashbuckling hustlers. Frances Stonor Saunders' glittering, hard-edged prose sweeps the reader back to a time when politics was everything, and spies with money knew the price of culture.'
[18] Thomas W. Braden, 'I'm Glad the CIA is "Immoral"', *Saturday Evening Post* (20 May 1967), pp. 10-14. The finger of suspicion naturally fell on Lasky, although no public evidence has emerged to suggest he was an agent of the CIA.
[19] Frank Kermode, email correspondence with the author, 30 July 2003.
[20] John Sutherland, *Stephen Spender: A Literary Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 356.
[21] Michael Josselson to Irving Kristol, 13 February 1955, quoted in Coleman, p. 74.
[22]Coleman, p. 69. Coleman examined the then embargoed CCF/IACF papers in Chicago, reaching conclusions diametrically opposed to those of Stonor Saunders in *Who Paid the Piper?*
[23] The 'End of Ideology' thesis was promoted at the CCF 'Future of Freedom' conference in Milan in August 1955. See Edward Shils, 'The End of Ideology?' *Encounter* (November 1955), pp. 52-58.
[24] See Hugh Wilford, 'The Uses of *Encounter*', *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 262-96.
[25] Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?* p. 165.
[26] Guy Ortolano's *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature, and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) situates C.P. Snow's Rede lecture back in its historical contexts with reference to the periodical controversy it occasioned.
[27] Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 138.
[28] Ibid., p. 138.
[29] Frank Kermode, 'Modernisms', *Encounter* (March 1966), p. 58.
[30] Kermode, 'Modernisms Again', *Encounter* (April 1966), p. 74.
[31] Wilford, 'The Uses of *Encounter*', p. 275.
[32] Ibid., p. 275.
[33] Marcus Cunliffe, 'Europe and America', *Encounter* (December 1961), p. 27 & 'American Trends', *Encounter* (July 1956), p. 78.

[34] Marcus Cunliffe, 'Black Muslims, White Liberals', *Encounter* (July 1964), p. 52.
[35] Marcus Cunliffe, 'The Intellectuals. II. The United States', *Encounter* (May 1955), p. 25.
[36] Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1951), p. 14.
[37] Lionel Trilling, 'Reflections on a Lost Cause', *Encounter* (September 1958), p. 4.
[38] Lionel Trilling, 'The Two Environments: Reflections on the Study of English', *Encounter* (July 1965), pp. 4, 6.
[39] Saul Bellow, 'Recent American Fiction', *Encounter* (November 1963), p. 26.
[40] Lionel Trilling, 'The Last Lover', *Encounter* (October 1958), pp. 9-18.
[41] Mary McCarthy, 'The Arthur Miller Case', *Encounter* (May 1957), p. 25.
[42] 'Manifesto of the Congress for Cultural Freedom', Berlin 1950, reprinted in Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, p. 249.
[43] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Journal de Combat', *New Statesman and Nation* (20 Dec 1963) reprinted in *Writers and Politics: Essays and Criticism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965).
[44] For *Encounter*'s association with Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell, see Wilford, 'The Uses of *Encounter*', pp. 282-88.
[45] William Empson to Christopher Ricks, 19 November 1964, in John Haffenden (ed.), *Selected Letters of William Empson* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 379. For the source of Empson's opposition to *Encounter*'s coverage of China, see John Haffenden, *William Emspon: Against the Christians* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 237-71.
[46] From O'Brien's 1964 congregation address as vice chancellor of the University of Ghana. Quoted in Donald Harman Akenson, *Conor: A Biography of Conor Cruise O'Brien, Volume 1* (Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 1994), p. 264.
[47] Denis Brogan, 'Introduction', in Stephen Spender, Irving Kristol and Melvin Lasky (eds.), *Encounters: An Anthology from the First Ten Years of* Encounter *Magazine* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), pp. xxiv, xxvi.
[48] O'Brien, 'Journal de Combat', *Writers and Politics*, pp. 171, 172, 173.
[49] O'Brien, The Homer Watt Lecture at New York University (19 May 1966), reprinted in Akenson, *Conor: A Biography of Conor Cruise O'Brien, Volume 2, Anthology* (Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 1994), p. 116.
[50] The unravelling of O'Brien's battle with the editors of *Encounter* is told in Frank Kermode's autobiography, *Not Entitled: A Memoir* (London: Flamingo, 1997), pp. 231-42.
[51] Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York, 1968), pp. 104-5.
[52] Edward Said, 'Hey, Mister, you want dirty book?' *London Review of Books* (30 September 1999), p. 54.
[53] Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p. 4.
[54] Quoted in Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), p. 200.
[55] Melvin Lasky, televised interview with William F. Buckley Jnr, broadcast in US in the programme 'Firing Line', 27 February 1968.
[56] Kermode, *Not Entitled*, p. 231.
[57] Matthew Spender, *A House in St John's Wood: In Search of My Parents* (London: William Collins, 2015), p. 60.
[58] Entry on '*Encounter* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom' in Lara Feigel and John Sutherland (eds.) with Natasha Spender, *Stephen Spender: New Selected Journals, 1939-1995* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), p. 757.
[59] Stephen Spender, *Love-Hate Relations: A Study of Anglo-American Sensibilities* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974), p. 41.
[60] Conor Cruise O'Brien to Claude Cockburn, 15 April 1966. Papers of Conor Cruise O'Brien, University College, Dublin. Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Burke's Great Melody', *Encounter* (February 1989), pp. 30-36.
[61] Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Press and the World: the forty-second Haldane Memorial Lecture delivered at Birkbeck College London 6 February 1980 (London: Birkbeck College,1980), p. 6.
[62] Hochgeschwender, 'A Battle of Ideas', p. 331.
[63] Scott-Smith, p. 4.
[64] Karl Miller, *Dark Horses: An Experience of Literary Journalism* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), p. 146.